

**Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Petitions Pursuant to Section 706 of the)	
Telecommunications Act of 1996)	WC Docket No. 14-115 (Wilson)
For Removal of State Barriers to)	WC Docket No. 14-116 (Chattanooga)
Broadband Investment)	
and Competition)	

COMMENTS OF HARFORD COUNTY, MARYLAND

I. INTRODUCTION

Harford County, Maryland is situated northeast of Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Harford County submits these comments in full support of the dual Petitions of the City of Wilson, North Carolina ("Wilson")¹ and the Electric Power Board of Chattanooga, Tennessee ("EPB")² (collectively "Petitioners") filed on July 24, 2014, and released for public comment on July 28, 2014.³ It is our intent that these comments, as well as those submitted by other public entities, businesses, and individuals will assist the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") in making a determination to preempt state laws restricting the deployment of certain

¹ See Petition Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 for Removal of State Barriers to Broadband Investment and Competition, filed by City of Wilson, North Carolina, WC Docket No. 14-115 (filed July 24, 2014) (Wilson, NC Petition).

² See Petition Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 for Removal of State Barriers to Broadband Investment and Competition, filed by Electric Power Board, Chattanooga, Tennessee, WC Docket No. 14-116 (filed July 24, 2014) (EPB Petition).

³ See Pleading Cycle Established for Comments on Electric Power Board and City of Wilson Petitions, Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Seeking Preemption of State Laws Restricting the Deployment of Certain Broadband Networks, Public Notice, WCB Docket Nos. 14-115 and 14-116 (rel. July 28, 2014).

broadband networks, thereby placing control of such a vital resource in the hands of communities and citizens.

II. BACKGROUND

Harford County is fortunate to be in Maryland, a state where anti-municipal broadband laws do not exist and where local government is free to make varying and complex choices about their broadband needs based on the intricacies of their own community. The process of determining how best to serve our County, how to secure funding for capital and operations costs, forging relationships with private sector potential partners, facilitating and maintaining service, and all the other details inherent in building, executing, and maintaining a network like ours is intricate and, at times, arduous. It demands flexibility. We surely would not have been able to complete what we have accomplished in Harford County today had we been forced to navigate the added complexity of legislation designed specifically to constrain these efforts. We summarize our background, our current work, and our future plans to illustrate the power of unobstructed community-focused innovation.

The Harford County Metro Area Network (HMAN) is a fiber optic, carrier-grade network that is being deployed throughout the County to provide equitable broadband access to County agencies, schools, libraries, and public safety sites. Conceptualized five years ago, we deployed the network in 2014. We have been fortunate to work with several other Maryland Counties as part of the Inter-County Broadband Network (ICBN), a consortium consisting of six counties with a shared vision for greater connectivity in our state. The HMAN utilizes diverse physical paths between its redundant core sites and distribution hubs—and in many cases redundant paths and uplinks from customer edge equipment to redundant distribution hubs—to mitigate risks of network outage due to electronics failures and fiber damage. We are deploying more than 100

route miles of fiber optic infrastructure and intend to establish fiber connectivity to key Internet peering locations and commercial datacenters in the Baltimore region. The County ultimately saves on the cost of telecommunications services by deploying its own network, while also having greater control over access afforded to its citizens. Certain parts of Harford County may not be attractive to private sector providers without the County's infrastructure.

We intend to leverage the HMAN to advance the availability, affordability, and reliability of connectivity services to advance economic development and quality of life. Currently our network connects County and municipal government as well as Harford County Public Schools, Harford County Public Libraries and the volunteer fire companies to the Internet. We can use our existing infrastructure to provide dark fiber leasing to commercial providers and businesses and seek partnerships with commercial ISPs to provide lit data transport and Internet services. We are in the midst of a feasibility study designed to enable us to expand the HMAN data backbone and services to more rural areas of the County and municipalities using wireless technologies, an example of the varying needs of the greater County. We hope to also facilitate widespread access to cloud-based services and applications with local points of presence, and deploy voice over IP (VoIP) telephony services for local anchor institutions. We aim to enable the communities in our County to take advantage of next-generation access to meet their broad range of needs, while keeping costs lower than what they might be through limited choices of private providers.

III. STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

Located in Maryland, Harford County is well situated to have the freedom to examine its own needs, create local legislation, and make more informed choices about what best serves our

County than would be possible at the state level. Our County is diverse, and consequently the needs of our citizens are also diverse. While we are part of the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, our footprint to the northwest becomes increasingly less populated, thereby significantly changing the needs of the residences and businesses there in comparison to those in the more densely populated suburban area. We must take care to deliberately consider the mosaic of potential customers we serve, even when our area covers only slightly more than 12,000 square miles, which is a fraction of the size of many of the states that have implemented sweeping anti-municipal broadband legislation. The challenges of connecting locations in urban settings are vastly different than those faced when attempting to bring connectivity to sparsely populated areas, and the solutions are therefore necessarily also vastly different. Again, ours is a noteworthy advantage. Because of the structure in Maryland, we are able to have a strong relationship with the state, especially its Department of Information Technology, with a shared goal of propelling us and the rest of the state toward greater access to the essential infrastructure of this era. Were our efforts curbed by the strict and stifling legislation that exists in nearly forty percent of the U.S., the story of Harford County would likely be much different.

VII. CONCLUSION

We fully support the Commission's removal of these artificial state barriers to broadband infrastructure investment, deployment, competition, and innovation. Preserving the right of localities to make informed decisions about what would best serve them is crucial. This is a pivotal time in our history as a nation. When the rest of the world is rapidly deploying this essential 21st century infrastructure, all options must be on the table for our country to remain

globally competitive. Removing the barriers to broadband investment and competition as requested in the Petitions will enable more communities to be self-reliant, and empower America to maximize all resources so that no one is left behind and unable to participate in this knowledge-based global economy. We respectfully request the Commission to consider our comments as it continues its review of these petitions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Theodore Pibil, Jr.", with a stylized, flowing script.

W. Theodore Pibil, Jr.

Director

Harford County, MD